

Remarks to the Community in Las Cruces, New Mexico

August 24, 2002

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. It's great to come to a place where you can see cowboy hats and belt buckles, boots. Thanks for letting me across the State line. [*Laughter*] I was just raised right around the corner, in Midland, Texas. So I kind of consider Las Cruces to be kind of home.

But thank you all for greeting me today, and thanks for the warm welcome. It is my honor to be here in this beautiful State, in this dynamic city, to talk about the three great goals we have for this country—three great goals: First is to win the war on terror; second is to make sure that we protect our homeland; and third is to assure you that we will not rest until our economy is strong. Anybody who wants to find work must be able to find work in this country. We're going to help this economy grow.

And this is a great place to talk about the strength of America. It's a great place to come to talk about the fact that, even though we've got challenges, we can overcome these challenges because we're Americans. We work hard. We have great values. We're optimistic people. There is no challenge that we can't overcome, and the people of this great part of the country understand that as well as anybody else.

I want to thank my friend the senior Senator, Pete Domenici. He's a fine, fine man. Not only is he a fine man, he is a great United States Senator. And not only is he a great United States Senator, he loves New Mexico a lot.

And then, of course, there's the retiring Congressman, Joe Skeen, who has brought such class to the office of—that he has held. We're real proud of Joe. We're proud of his courage. We're proud of his strength. We're going to miss him in Washington, DC, but Washington, DC's loss is your gain. He and Mary love this part of the country, and he's going to have a lot of farewells. This is not his farewell speech from me, but nevertheless, it's my honor to talk in front of his constituents and tell him how much we love him and how much we care for he and Mary. Joe,

thanks for coming today. [*Applause*] They sure love you, Joe.

Jay, I want to thank you very much for inviting me and this small entourage I travel with—[*laughter*—to this very important campus. It's—New Mexico State has got a proud reputation, and you've made it even more proud, Jay. And I appreciate your service. I want to thank all the folks who helped put this event on, particularly in this beautiful facility, where I guess the Aggies tend to dominate.

I want to thank Ruben Smith, the mayor of Las Cruces, for being here. Mayor Smith, thank you for your time. Dora Dominguez, the president of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber, helped put on this event, and I'm most grateful for the Chamber members who are here. I want to thank very much Sara Misquez, who is the president of the Mesquero Apache Tribe, who is with us today. I appreciate Jesus Segura, who is the mayor of Sunland Park.

I want to thank very much a special person who met me out there at the airport, Ophelia Chaffino. She is a USA Freedom Corps volunteer. She is a foster grandparent who tutors 4th and 5th year-olds. Let me tell you why I want to bring up the—Ophelia and people like her. Because I understand, and I hope you understand, the great strength of our country is not our governments. The great strength of our country is our people. And when people—and people can make a significant difference in all kinds of ways in the communities in which they live. The fact that Ophelia wants to mentor children is a significant contribution.

Oh, you know, some may step back and say, "Changing one life isn't that much." Changing one life is a lot—a lot. And I want to thank the soldiers in the armies of compassion which exist in Las Cruces, all across New Mexico, and all across our country, for working hard to make our society a compassionate and decent place. Where are you, Ophelia? Thank you for being here. Please stand up and wave.

I appreciate so very much Ruben King-Shaw, Jr., who works for the Health and Human Services Administration, being with us today. Why don't you stand up, Ruben? I'm going to say something about you. Ruben

is here to make sure that we improve health care for the people of New Mexico. You can sit down, Ruben. [*Laughter*] Ruben is a good man. I've known him—I'm proud that he came up and worked in my administration. He also has got a big heart.

One of the concerns we have is that nearly half of low-income adults here in New Mexico are uninsured. And that's a problem—and that's a problem. Most of the uninsured adults are Latinos or Hispanic. And so what Ruben did was, he came to approve an application that will allow for, the best way to put it is creative financing, to make sure that 40,000 additional adults in this State are able to get health insurance, to work with the State and Senator Domenici to provide a plan so that more of your citizens will be able to have health insurance. And Ruben, I want to thank you for taking time off of your vacation to come and work that plan and implement it so that the good folks in New Mexico have got a better quality of life. Thank you for coming.

No, as Pete mentioned, we've got some hurdles to cross here in the country. We've got some issues we have to deal with. One of the issues, of course, is our economy. When I came in, the country was beginning a recession. It's just a fact. We had three quarters of negative growth. And then the terrorists hit us, and that affected our economy. And then something bubbled to the service that had been brewing for a while: We found out some of our citizens wanted to cook the books. Some of our citizens didn't feel like they could do it the honest way. They had to try to slide one by us. Corporate scandals erupted.

We've had three major challenges to job creation in the country. But you need to know, we're going to deal with it, and we're going to deal with it in a strong way. My view is, the role of Government is not to create wealth, but the role of Government is to create an environment in which small businesses and entrepreneurs and farmers and ranchers can prosper, so we can create jobs around the country.

And one of the things we did together—and I'm talking about Republicans and Democrats—is we took a page out of this textbook that said, "If you want to try to en-

courage job creation, if you want the economy to grow, you let hard-working people keep more of their own money." Pete and I and Joe have read that textbook. Some in Washington haven't. [*Laughter*] We understand if you let a person keep more of their own money—by the way, you notice I don't say "keep more of the Government's money." It's not the Government's money we're talking about. It's the people's money. If people keep more of their own money, it means somebody is going to demand a good or a service. And if somebody demands a good and service, somebody is likely to produce that good or service, and when somebody produces that good and service, somebody's more likely to find work. The tax relief that we passed happened right at the right time. And for the sake of economic vitality and job creation, we need to make the tax relief permanent.

And at the same time, my job is to work with fine Members like Senator Domenici and make sure that we don't overspend. We want to make sure that we're fiscally responsible. That doesn't mean that we can't set priorities and fund those priorities, and we will. But as Pete will tell you, every idea is a good idea in Washington, no matter what it costs. [*Laughter*] My job is to make sure that the good ideas that meet our priorities are funded, like fighting and winning the war on terror, protecting the homeland, and taking care of people who can't help themselves, and education—our children. Those are the priorities.

We need to work together. When they get back out of their break and when they get back to Washington, they need to work to put some of our construction people back to work, by passing a terrorism insurance bill, one that will allow large-scale construction programs to go forward that aren't going forward because they can't get insurance necessary to cover a possible terrorist attack. And by the way, the bill ought to be more worried about the hardhats than the lawyers. This ought to be a bill that is aimed to help the working people.

We need to make sure that we've got pension reform. A lot of you all have got assets tied up in what they call 401(k)s or IRAs, but if you're in a 401(k) and you're working

for a company and the boss sells, you ought to sell. By the way, I've just signed, in a new law, that type of provision. It says what's good for one is good for all. If it's good for the head man, it ought to be good for everybody else working for the company.

But we also need to have a law to allow people to diversify. We shouldn't force people who work for a company and who get company stock to have to stay in that stock forever. After a reasonable period of time, they ought to be able to diversify their portfolio. They ought to get sound investment advice, and they ought to get reports on a quarterly basis, not an annual basis. In order to make the economy stronger, we need to have pension reform on behalf of the workers of this country.

Thirdly, I just got a new bill that will allow me to encourage trade. Let me explain my position on trade, and I'll start with something that's dear to the people of this part of the world, and that's agriculture. The good news for America is, we grow enough food to feed ourselves. That's good news. Imagine what it would be like if we didn't grow enough food to feed ourselves, if we had to go around the world asking for food. We'd be a little more vulnerable as a nation.

It's good for our national security that we've got enough food to feed ourselves. But we've got more than we need, because we're the best in the world at growing things. Our farmers and ranchers are the best in the world. And if you're the best in the world at something, you ought to encourage it. And so, therefore, my job is to open up markets for U.S. agricultural products. It is the best way to allow our producers to make a living. It is in our Nation's interest we do so.

And people say, "Well, of course, he's going to say that, but that hasn't been the way it's been." And I understand that. I know there's some skepticism about level playing fields. And I know a lot of the farmers and ranchers and some from other industries have said, "Well, we've heard that song and dance before." But you've just got to know how I think. If you're good at something, we're going to promote it, and we ought to start from our strength when it comes to enhancing job creation and creating wealth through trade, and that is agriculture.

And let me just give you one example of what I'm talking about. We grow a lot of chickens here in America. [Laughter] Well, we do. [Laughter] And the Russians decided they were going to—they thought about buying our chickens. Then we got the chickens moving, and they changed their mind. And I talked to President Putin quite a bit about that. So one time at one of our press conferences, he said, "Listen, our relationship has changed so much, we're no longer talking war; we're talking chickens." [Laughter] Two days ago, our Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman, announced that the Russians are going to buy all the chickens they said they would buy. That's good for chicken producers. It's good for hog producers. It's good for cattle producers. It's good for America. It's good for America that we open up markets to sell our products. It's going to mean jobs for the working people of this country.

It's commonsense policy. And the other day I had a chance to lay out a little bit of commonsense policy which affects the folks in the northern part of your State that Pete and I just talked about. We're having some serious fires here in America. One of our most precious resources, our forests, are burning up. And one of the reasons they're burning up is because we're doing a lousy job of maintaining our forests; we're doing a lousy job of maintaining our treasure. We've got to change our forest policy.

Our forest policy now says, hands off. And guess what happens when you have a hands-off policy—your forests become diseased; they end up like a big pile of kindling. And all it takes is one lightning strike.

I flew over the huge fire in Oregon—I mean, thousands and thousands of precious forest lands are burning. For the sake of a healthy forest, for the sake of leaving a legacy for future generations, we will change the forest policy of this country to thin the forest lands to keep them healthy.

And finally, I had the honor of signing the most comprehensive corporate reform bill since Franklin Roosevelt was the President. It's a long time ago, it seems like. But it was needed. It was when Republican and Democrats came together. It's a good piece of legislation which said the auditors will be audited;

crooked people are going to be held to account. We don't want anybody taking advantage of trustworthy people. For the sake of economic vitality and job creation, for the sake of confidence in our system, we're going to rout those out who cook the books. It's no longer going to be easy money; it's going to be hard time for people who have not upheld their responsibility.

We've got hurdles to cross, but I'm confident in the future of this country. I'm confident in our economic vitality, because I know our people and I understand the entrepreneurial spirit. I know the fact that we're the best and most productive workers in the world. We are. I know that low interest rates and low inflation provide the platform for economic vitality. We're just not going to rest. We're not going to rest until people are able to find work, people who are looking for work can find work.

And I'm not going to rest when it comes to protecting our homeland either. That's my most important job, is to prevent people from hitting us again. I say "people"—I say "people"—let me qualify that—coldblooded killers. That's all they are. There's no other way to say it. There's no other apt description than to tell you exactly how I think they are, and they're coldblooded killers. And they want to kill again because they hate what we love, and we love freedom.

We love the fact that people can worship freely in America. We respect the fact that people worship freely in America. They don't value life. We value life. We say, "Everybody counts in America. Everybody is precious in this land." So long as they're out there, we've got to do everything we can to protect the homeland. And you need to know there's a lot of good folks working hard to do just that, good folks at the Federal level and at the State level and the local level.

I mean, anytime we're getting a hint, we're acting on it. Anytime we get a whisper that somebody might be thinking about doing something to America, people are on it. And we're following every lead. People are working hard. But I want to take a step further, and I've asked Congress to join me in setting up a Department of Homeland Security. And let me explain to you why I made that suggestion.

There are over 100 agencies in Washington, scattered all over Washington, I might add, that have got something to do with homeland security. And it seems logical to me that if the number one priority of this administration—and by the way, future administrations—is to protect the homeland, then we ought to have the capacity to make that the number one priority of the other 100 agencies. You see, you can't just say, "That's your priority," and everybody snaps to. The best way to get them to snap to is to put them under one Secretary of Homeland Security. And that's what we intend to do.

But let me tell you something, what I'm not going to do is accept a bill that tries to micromanage the process, tell us who to hire, where to move them, and how to do it. I warn the Senate—and Pete—I'm not warning Pete, because he understands what I'm talking about. He knows who I'm talking about. There are Senators who are more worried about the special interests in Washington than they are about protecting the people. They're more interested in their turf than they are about homeland security. And they need to get me a good bill. I can count on him.

But the best way to protect the homeland—we're going to work hard to do this—we're going to make sure our border—we need to know who's coming in the country, what are they bringing in the country, if they're leaving the country when they say they're going to leave the country. We need to have a strong first-responders initiative to work with the mayors and the county judges and the sheriff's departments to be able to respond. We need to work closely with some of our labs to devise ways to be able to detect and respond to a bioterrorist attack, for example, or the use of weapons of mass destruction. There's a lot we're going to do.

But my theory is and my strategy is—and it's the way it's going to be so long as I'm the President—the way to best protect the homeland is to hunt the killers down, one by one, and bring them to justice. And so I submitted a budget, an appropriations request to the Congress that was the largest defense increase since Ronald Reagan was the President.

I did it for two reasons—two reasons: One, anytime we put our soldiers into harm's way, they deserve the best pay, the best training, and the best equipment possible. We not only owe it to the men and women who wear our uniform; we owe that to their loved ones as well. The other reason I submitted this budget is because I wanted to tell our friends and allies and enemy alike that we're in this deal for the long haul. See, when it comes to defending freedom, there is no calendar that says you've got to quit by such-and-such a date. That this—history has called us to action, and we're going to stay on course, stay steady, until we have achieved the mission, which is to make the world free, to defend our freedoms.

Now, I understand that this is a different kind of war, and I hope you do as well. You see, no longer are we able to count the size of the enemy by counting tanks or airplanes or ships. This is an enemy which hides in caves and then sends youngsters to their suicidal death. These people kind of run and scatter. So it's a different kind of mission; it's a different kind of war. But we've got a strategy. And they understand the strategy is, get them on the run, and once we get them on the run, don't let them light anywhere. And if they do try to light someplace, bring them to justice. And that's precisely what the United States is going to do.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. And so my request to the Congress—and I know Pete agrees with me—is to get the defense bill to my desk as soon as they get back. We need to get the defense bill signed. See, the Senate passed it, and the House passed it. They need to get the differences quickly. We're at war. We need to send that signal loud and clear to our troops and to the world, that we're strongly united in this effort to win the war against terror.

I say it's hard to count, but I've got kind of an idea of how we're doing. I say "kind of." We estimate that over 2,500 or—of the enemy have been captured by the United States or our friends and allies. And remember, we've got a huge coalition of countries that are working together to cut their money off or to share intelligence, put pressure. And

the—we've got about 2,500 of them or so, maybe a little more than that, that are now in captivity, that are no longer in caves, that aren't able to fight. And just about that many weren't as lucky.

We will continue to uphold the doctrine that says, "If you harbor one of them, you're just as guilty as those who killed American citizens." We will be relentless and patient and strong and determined and wise about how we conduct this war. And we're going to win the war on terror. We owe it to our children and our grandchildren; that's who we owe it to. We owe it to them as well to make sure that the world's worst leaders are not able to develop and deploy the world's worst weapons. We've got a lot of work to do. But I'm proud of our military, and I'm proud of our team, and we're going to get the job done.

I believe that out of the evil done to America is going to come some incredible good. I believe that. I know it's going to happen, because we're America. I can't imagine what was going through the enemy's mind when they hit us. They must have thought, "That Nation is so self-absorbed and so materialistic, so shallow in its beliefs, so selfish, that after 9/11 all they might do is file a lawsuit or two." [Laughter] They found out different about America. They understand—they're beginning to learn the character of this Nation. They and our allies and the enemy understand that when we go into a country, we go in not as conquerors but as liberators.

I want you all to tell your children, this great Nation, in liberating Afghanistan, made it possible for young girls, many young girls for the first time in their life, to be able to go to school. They're learning that this Nation does not seek revenge; we seek justice. And we will all learn, by being strong and tough and diligent and compassionate, we can achieve peace.

In the midst of all this talk—in the midst of all this talk, I want you all to tell your children that this country of ours yearns for peace, that we want peace for not only this generation but future generations to come. Oh, the hill might be steep at times. It might be a rugged terrain, like you're used to out here in New Mexico, but we're going to cross that terrain to achieve peace—not only peace

for ourselves, but, see, we value life all around the world. When we say we value life and everybody counts, it's not just American lives; it's lives in every part of the world.

I believe we can achieve peace by routing out terror and professing the God-given values—not American values—God-given values that matter to everybody. I believe we can achieve peace in parts of the world that have quit on peace.

I believe out of the evil done to America can come some incredible good here at home, besides peace. See, ours is a great country, full of hope. But we've got to recognize there are pockets of despair and addiction and hopelessness. We've got to understand that when one hurts, all hurt. We have a chance, I believe, to take the evil done to America and convert it to great good. Because—well, let me put it to you this way: People say, "What can I do to help?" You know what you can do to help? You can love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. That's what you can do.

Oftentimes we look to Government, but Government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. No, it's those millions of acts of kindness and decency that take place in America which really and truly define the true character of the country and enable me to predict that out of the evil done to America will come some good.

You see, mentoring a child is part of helping change America for the better. We can change our society, one person at a time. I hear people say, "I can't do everything." Of course you can't, but you can do something. You can do something to help change America, one lost soul at a time.

And that's happening in this country; it really is. People are beginning to understand there is a different kind of patriotism alive in America. It's the patriotism that's much bigger than just putting your hand over your heart and saying, "one Nation under God." It's a patriotism that says, serving something greater than yourself is part of being a patriotic American. It's a patriotism that understands that you're responsible for the decisions you make in life. And if you happen to be fortunate to be a mom or a dad, love your child with all your heart and all your

soul. Tell them you love them every single day, in order to make America a more compassionate and more decent place.

It's a patriotism that says, each of us have a responsibility to the quality of life in the communities in which we live. Help your schools. Go to your churches or synagogues and help feed the hungry. That's what the patriotism is, and it's alive and well and was best exemplified on that fateful, horrible day, September the 11th, when some of our fellow citizens on a flight that was flying across the country realized the plane they were on was to be used as a weapon, a weapon perhaps at the White House or at our Nation's Capitol. History shows that they were on cell phones, and they told their loved ones they loved them. Some of the last words they said were "love." They said a prayer. One guy said, "Let's roll." And they served something greater than themselves in life. They set an example for all of us here in America.

No, out of the evil done to America is going to come incredible good, because this is the most compassionate, decent, strong nation on the face of the Earth.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. in the Pan American Center at New Mexico State University. In his remarks, he referred to Mary Skeen, wife of Representative Joe Skeen; Jay Gogue, president, New Mexico State University; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Dinner for Congressional Candidate Steve Pearce in Las Cruces

August 24, 2002

Thank you all very much. Thanks a lot. Congressman, thank you. I'm proud to come and ask for the people of this good district in this important State to vote for Steve Pearce to be the next United States Congressman. He's a man of good judgment. When we were walking in, he said, "A lot of folks wish Laura were here." [Laughter] And I told him, well, he drew the short straw. [Laughter]